

Chapter II

Early Indian Education: Gurukulas and Mahāvihāras

The present chapter presents a general sketch of early Indian education. This chapter focuses on special traits of the age *viz.* social, economic and religious, which contributed to the creation of suitable environment for the rise of education. It provides an introduction to the developed and prevailing system of education in ancient India i.e. *gurukulas* and *mahāvihāras*. It also explains the details of *gurukula* education system such as its method of Instruction, sessions, curriculum, accessibility, teachers, students, *brahmāchari's* life, objectives, and output. It also describes Takṣaśīlā, which witnessed the height of *gurukula* education system. In this way, it answers questions such as; what were patterns of educational development in ancient India? What were the favourable reasons for the growth of *gurukulas*? Was it reflected the *Vedic* Civilization? What was the nature of *gurukula* education system and to whom it was accessible?

Early India had a unique position in the ancient world especially for its highly institutionalised education system. The secular and religious knowledge diffused from the early Indian learning centres showed the right path to both ancient Indians and foreigners. Early Indian instructional organism still functioned as the base and the source of inspiration for the modern Indian learning apparatus. Some of the features of these antique-teaching centres like the friendly relation between student and teacher, the natural environment for study, suitability to the society and the life, and guidance to be perfect human beings are still a dream for recent Indian schooling. Early Indian education during its evolution and its decline had come across with almost all of the qualities that we strive for in modern education system. Early Indian education was connected with the needs and requirements of society of Ancient India. Related to this, we can see modifications and changes in ancient Indian education according to the development and stability in society, economy, polity and religion. Education in Ancient India was also an integral part of the *Āryan* religion and there had been an abundance of religious literatures on the subject since the day of the *Rig*

Veda, which is the oldest textbook of religion in the world. The oldest religious scripture had given us the oldest education system in the world. A series of religious scriptures since the composition of the *Rig Veda* (knowledge of thanksgiving) throws a flood of light on education in Ancient India.

In ancient India from the advent of *Āryan* till the arrival of Muslims, we have a long tradition of education system with gradual modification according to changes in polity, society and religion. The various findings at the Harrapan sites of excavations are quite impressive and tend to strengthen the belief that this glorious civilization was created and it has sustained an advance state of professional knowledge.¹ How did the Harrapan civilization acquire this highly advanced technical knowledge such as unified units of weight and measurement, potter's wheel, kiln-burnt equal size bricks, massive building architecture, town planning, boring of hard substances like carnelian and casting alloy of metals as well as the highly advanced aesthetic sense as shown by beautiful designs of ornaments, the superb relief figures on seals and the execution of fine stone statues?² The genesis of this knowledge is yet to be traced as the decipherment of their scripts of pictorial writings is awaited. With the decline of prominent cities of the Harrapan Civilisation such as Harappa, Mohenjo-Daro, Kalibanga etc., there was a diversification of Harrapan culture, which in turn resulted in the emergence of rural society, where degradation in the advance knowledge system of Harappa is witnessed. Somehow this continuity of growth broke with the substantial gap in ancient Indian history after the Indus Valley Civilization.

A new era began in ancient Indian education system with the arrival of *Āryan*, which maintained the continuity till medieval age. Early Indian education started from the guidance of individual teacher in his home and its peak point is reflected in large educational complexes, which can be termed as 'university'. The beginning of ancient Indian education system is evidenced by the *Rig Vedic* Age in its *guru-śiṣya paramparā* or *gurukula* tradition, which later developed as *Vedic* schools and colleges. The apogee of this education started with the emergence of heterodox sects

¹ M. L. Bhagi, *Ancient India: Culture and Thought*, The Indian Publication, Ambala Cantt., 1970, p.

² For detail of these activities of the Harappans see J. Marshall et al., *Mohenjo-daro and the Indus Civilization: Being an official account of archeological excavation at Mohenjo-daro carried out by the government of India between the year 1922 and 1927*, Vol.3 London, 1931.

like Buddhism and Jainism and in the Gupta Age, it contributed a lot in the development of massive education complexes *mahāvihāras*, where almost all the facilities for studying was available. It also symbolises the modest beginning of organised or institutional education, which is visible in the establishments like Nālandā, Vikramashīlā, Odantapurī and Valabhī Mahāvihāra etc. Among these institutions, Nālandā Mahāvihāra was the earliest and the coordinator of all the Mahāvihāra's educational system. We will discuss this detail in the subsequent chapter.

We can here presume that early Indian education can be broadly divided in two categories such as *gurukula* and *mahāvihāra* traditions. The *gurukula* education system symbolises *guru-śiṣya paramparā* related to *Vedic* school teaching. On the other hand, the *mahāvihāra* education signifies the beginning of university/institutional/organised education within large complexes in modest way. The growth and function of Nālandā Mahāvihāra can be treated as divider line and link between the *gurukula* and the *mahāvihāra* learning apparatus. The first and the largest Nālandā Mahāvihāra was the beginning of institutional study, which reflected the peak point of both *gurukula* and *mahāvihāra* tradition with assimilation and improvement of their features. In this way, we can also call the *gurukula* and the *mahāvihāra* traditions respectively as Pre-Nālandā and the Nālandā education system. It is also important that these developments were not isolated to each other. The *Vedic* schools and the Buddhist *mahāvihāras* existed and functioned simultaneously with their rules, regulation and patronages. And it was the *Vedic* schools which provided base for the *mahāvihāras* education or monastery education through the supply of learned teachers and courses for study.

II.1. Gurukula Education System

The *gurukula* education system is what we see in mainstream ancient Indian historical writing, which represents the *guru-śiṣya paramparā* or *ācārya-kula-s*.³ This *gurukula* tradition gives a clear picture of early Indian education. Almost every historian of ancient India has said something about this ancient tradition while dealing

³ Scharfe termed the *guru-śiṣya paramparā* or the Gurukula tradition by the name of *ācārya-kula-s*. See, Scharfe Hartmut, *Education in Ancient India*, in the series of Handbook of Oriental Studies edition J. Bronkhorst, Section two, Vol.16, Koninklijke Brill NV, Leiden, The Netherlands, 2002, p. 120ff.

with early Indian culture. Some of them really have brought some new ideas. This tradition of learning started from the early *Vedic* Age i.e. 1500 B.C. and being incorporated in the regulation of social life in the later *Vedic* Age validated it. The entire life was divided in four stages *brahmācharya*, *grihastha*, *Vānaprastha* and *Sannyāsa*. The first stage *brahmācharya* was the age of studying or studentship on which success of the remaining stages was dependent. In this stage, students used to be admitted in *gurukula* for studying. With the passing of the *Aranyakas* in the *Upaniṣads*, the concept of the scope of *brahmācharya* is widened to include not merely the student period but the entire course of life regulated by the disciplines of its four successive *āśramas* or stages as the way leading to become a *Brāhmaṇa*. Thus, the knowledge in ancient India was created, preserved and transmitted to the posterity by *ṛishis*, sages or seers who mostly belonged to the priestly class among the *Āryans* and were known as *Brāhmaṇas*, possessors of “*Brahman*” or supreme knowledge of the *Brahma* or the universe through *tapa* or *yoga* or meditation.

II.2. The Genesis of the *Gurukula*

The *gurukula* education system comprised of small domestic schools each of which was run by a teacher who admitted to his instructions pupils who had to live with him for a considerable period of time under prescribed disciplines or vows as *vrātacharis* or *brahmācharis*. It was situated not very far from and not very close to the population. Every *saint* was a teacher who would start by imparting to his son the knowledge of texts, which he had personally acquired from his ancestors and such texts would be a special property of his family. Each family of *ṛishis* thus functioned like a *Śākha* or *charana* or *Vedic* schools admitting pupils for instruction in the literatures, texts or hymns in its possession.⁴ The number of such *charanas* or *gurukulas* or *Vedic* schools increased proportionately to the number of *saints* composing new hymns as well as to the number of successful students, who after the completion of studies set up their own *Vedic* schools in their residence or neighbouring area.

⁴ Santos Kumar Das, *The Education System of The Ancient Hindus*, Gyan Publication, New Delhi, reprinted 1996, pp. 11-13.

Special care was always devoted to the higher schools of the *Brāhmaṇas* and the course of instruction extended over a long series of years. It is a result of this process and further specialisation of the various branches of learning that we have the systematisation of the *Vedāngas* in special schools in not later than the fifth century B.C.⁵ These *Vedic* schools existing from the earliest times developed in the course of time into important colleges, like Takṣaśīlā. But the most important seat of learning that emerged in this period was the *parishad* or assemblies of learned *Brahmins*. It was an assembly of ten or three qualified *Brāhmaṇas* who granted the title of *snatakā* or *Vedic* graduate after the completion of *Vedic* study.⁶ We find that young scholar – Śvetaketu – approaching their tribal *parishad* at the end of their education to get recognition for their scholarship.⁷ The *parishad* also gave the final decision on all points connected with the Brāhmaṇic religion and learning, which also practically altered the laws to a considerable degree by additions and alterations.⁸

It is not easy to trace the growth of educational institutions in early India. Early Indian education was embedded with the contemporary society and religion. Especially the intimate relationship between learning systems and societal changes cannot be ignored. It is difficult to explore the separate line of growth for early Indian education other than developments and changes in religion and society. Therefore, we have to carefully study ancient Indian society and religion and then we shall be able to find out roots of early Indian education up to some extent. It is two-way interaction between education and society because education shapes society and vice versa society also decides the nature of education. We can underline social, religious, and economic causes of the growth of early Indian education in the light of religious texts and the contemporary studies on socio-economic history of ancient India.

⁵ For the beginning of specialization, see, *Manu*, George Buhler (trans.), Sacred Books of the East Series, F. Max Muller (ed.), Vol.XXV, first edition, Oxford, 1886, second edition, Motilal Banarsidass, New Delhi, 1964, p. XLVI ff.

⁶ Yajñavalkya talks of three kinds of *snatakā* i.e. the *vidyāsnatakā*, the *vratasnatakā* and the *ubhayaśnatakā*. For detail see Dr. Sudhakar Chattopadhyaya, *Social Life in Ancient India (in the background of Yajñavalkya-smṛiti)*, Academic Publishers, Calcutta, first edition, 1965, p. 45.

⁷ A. S., Altekar, *Education in Ancient India*, India Book Shop, Benaras, 1934, p. 245.

⁸ Santosh Kumar Das, *The Education System of The Ancient Hindus*, Gyan Publication, New Delhi, reprinted 1996, pp. 55-57.

II.2.a Social Causes

Early Indian education reflected and incorporated dominant features of the contemporary society from its inception during the Rig *Vedic* Age. The story of early Indian education also indirectly depicts the *Vedic* Civilization. It budded in the Rig *Vedic* period and flowered in the Later *Vedic* Age following and incorporating societal and religious growth. The complete and solid base for early Indian education developed in the *Vedic* Age. With the rise of *mahājanapadas* and the second urbanisation, the *gurukula* education expanded to all over north India. The rule of the Mauryan and the Gupta dynasty witnessed pan-Indian empires, which contributed in the consolidation of early Indian education and led to the maximum height of growth.

The earliest text was the *Rig Veda* and subsequent to this are the *Atharva*, *Yajur* and *Sama Veda* and attached to each *Veda* are other categories of texts composed later such as the *Brāhmaṇas*, the *Aranyakas* and the *Upaniṣad*, which comes under the corpus of *Vedic* composition. The *Vedic* compositions were memorised and handed down orally for many centuries and could have been transferred, if at all, to writing by about 300 B.C.⁹ These compositions were generally concerned with religious rituals and social beliefs. They had a limited function and were composed not in the commonly used language but in a language that was probably limited to the priests. We cannot imagine either oral or written transmission of the corpus of *Vedic* literatures without the educational institution of *gurukula*. The teachers and students of *gurukula* first orally preserved and transmitted the *Vedic* literatures then later encrypted it.

The birth of early Indian education is also related to the gradual evolution of the knowledge of medicine. In the *Vedic* phase, Indian medicine is nearly exclusively limited to the pathology and to the material medica. This last one was obtained from the regions of Indus and from a side of the Ganges country only. The doctor was a connoisseur and a gatherer of medicinal herbs who used and made the herbs efficient by reciting magic in the *Vedic* Age. Without doubt the use of medicinal herbs are

⁹ Romila, Thapar, “The First Millennium B. C. in Northern India (Up to the end of the Mauryan Period)”, in Romila Thapar (ed.), *Recent Perspectives of Early Indian History*, Revised Second Edition 1998, Popular Prakashan, Mumbai, Reprinted 2002, p. 89.

attested here and there in the Rig *Veda* – but it is only a limited and occasional documentation – from which it was possible to draw out only few fragments about the knowledge and experiences already acquired in that time, which represent a really advanced evolutive phase regarding the oldest beginning of the medical practice. The evolution of Indian medicine marks with *Brāhmaṇas* and much more with *Upaniṣad*, a speculative phase to examine the connection existing between soul and body and the psychological essence of the living person.¹⁰ In the medical field, we notice a remarkable progress both in somatology and in physiology. The relationship between Indian medicine and *gurukulas* was interdependent to each for their growth.

The rise of *varṇa* is associated with the Later *Vedic* Age, which was a division of society to maintain rising agricultural social order. The importance of *varṇas* in the rise of the state is chiefly dealt in the *Purāṇas*. According to them, when the means of subsistence had been provided, people were divided into four *varṇas*. The *Brāhmaṇas* were meant for praying, the *Kṣatriya* for fighting, the *Vaiśyas* for producing and the *Śūdras* were addicted to manual tasks. The maintenance of *varṇavyavasthā* was essential for the survival of state and society.¹¹ There was a need of an institution for preservation and extension of the *varṇavyavasthā* such as *gurukula*. It was *gurukulas*, which maintained and promoted *varṇavyavasthā* through their teaching as *gurukulas* trained their disciples to be a total human being who should act according to the prevailed social norms. The Brāhmaṇical sources also refer that the most important duty of the king was to maintain *varṇavyavasthā* and most of the kings were also the product of the *gurukula*.

The evolution of caste structure in the Gupta Age shows that the caste of an individual may not have been decided by birth at least in the initial stages of its formation as it was formed by the assimilation of both *Āryan* and non-*Āryan* tribes. A lower caste or mixed caste person is said to have been raised a higher status because

¹⁰ Mario Vallauri, “Ancient Indian Medicine”, *East and West*, Vol. 5, No.2, 1954, p. 100.

¹¹ Ram Sharan Sharma, “Role of Property, Family and Caste in the Origin of the State in Ancient India”, in Brajadulal Chattopadhyaya (ed.), *Essays in Ancient Indian Economic History*, Indian History Congress, Golden Jubilee Year Publication Series, Vol.II, Munshiram Manoharlal, New Delhi, 1987, p. 05.

of the possession of wisdom. For instance, Kavasa – the son of Ilusa, a slave woman – is raised to the status of *Brāhmaṇa*. The authorship of *Āitareya Brāhmaṇa* is attributed to Mahīdāsa, a son of female slave.¹² The *Dharmaśāstras* also tells that inferior castes can attain the status of a higher caste through higher knowledge; similarly through sinful acts, higher castes are degraded to lower castes.¹³ In this way, early Indian education was a source of upward social mobility, which helped its centre *gurukulas* to grow day by day.

Indo-*Āryan* (a branch of Indo-European) and Dravidian language families have been the major contributors of the development of Indian culture and society. There are a number of linguistic similarities binding Indo-*Āryan* and Dravidian, which gradually developed when these linguistic groups came into contact with each other in about 1500 B.C. It is claimed that this contact led to the process of ‘Indianisation’ of the immigrant Indo-*Āryan* speakers. The contemporary educational institutions might have played important role in Indianisation. The composite *Āryan* speaking society evolved by recruiting members from both *Āryan* and non-*Āryan* speech groups. *Āryan* priests also trained non-*Āryan* in *gurukulas*.

The functional nature of *gurukulas* as a linguistic centre also helped in their evolution and progress. The *gurukula* was a centre for preservation, improvement and expansion of the *Vedic* Language or classical Sanskrit. The definition of *ārya* required the correct use of Sanskrit and was soon to include the observing of the *varnāśramadharmā* — a caste-based society.¹⁴ The *ārya* had to know the correct pronunciation and grammar of Sanskrit, for faulty use of language would reduce the speaker to being regarded as a *mlecchā* — one who is beyond the social pale, a term associated at this time with the eastern areas.¹⁵ The *Vedic* language was the possession

¹² *Āitareya Brāhmaṇa*, 2, 8, 1.

¹³ *Āpastamba Dharmasūtra*, 2, 5, 10, 11.

¹⁴ Romila, Thapar, “The First Millennium B. C. in Northern India (Up to the end of the Mauryan Period)”, in Romila Thapar (ed.), *Recent Perspectives of Early Indian History*, Revised Second Edition 1998, Popular Prakashan, Mumbai, Reprinted 2002, p. 106.

¹⁵ *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa*, 3.2.1.23

of priests and they zealously guarded its purity against the corruption of any kind in their inherited *gurukulas*. The priest and *guru* also transferred Classical Sanskrit from one generation to another through oral education to students.

It is claimed that the process leading to the development of a linguistic area, as an “Indianisation” process of the immigrant Indo-*Āryan* speakers is possible through an “extensive bilingualism”, the only social factor which accounts for the process. It is claimed that Dravidian speakers – who were bilingual and who learnt Indo-*Āryan* as the second language – introduced this new contrast similar to the pattern in the first language/mother tongue. This new contrast can be noticed from very early stages (for example, Rig *Veda*) of Indo-*Āryan*.¹⁶ Non-*Āryan* members of society must have felt the need for knowing the *Āryan* language for communication purposes and also to identify themselves with the group into which they were incorporated. The members belonging to the non-*Āryan* language group may have considered the language of the *Brāhmaṇas* as ritually prestigious. It is also observed that *gurukulas* started in the Rig *Vedic* period. Dravidian speakers most probably learnt Indo-*Āryan* language in *gurukulas*. Also mainstream desirous Dravidians were mostly admitted as students in these *gurukulas*, which was the main reason behind the success of *gurukulas* education system.

It is well known that there were in early India institutions of various designations like *sabhā*, *samāja* and *gosthi* resembling very much the modern club.¹⁷ They were possible source of enlightenment. Vātsyāyana tells us that there were discussions on literature, music, dancing and other arts should take place. We also find a reference to a library and librarians in a *Brāhmaṇa* village called *Vikarama-panḍya-chaturvedī-maṅgalam*. But we do not know whether or how far they were used as vehicles of education.¹⁸

¹⁶ K. Meenakshi, “Linguistic and the Study of Early Indian History” in Romila Thapar (ed.), *Recent Perspectives of Early Indian History*, Revised Second Edition 1998, Popular Prakashan, Mumbai, Reprinted 2002, pp. 63-64.

¹⁷ R. C. Majumdar, *Corporate Life in Ancient India*, second edition, K. L. Mukhopadhyay Firma, Calcutta, 1969, pp. 392-94.

¹⁸ Santosh Kumar Das, *The Economic History of Ancient India: From the Earliest Time down to the Invasion of India by Alexander the Great*, Vol. I, Second edition, Mitra Press, Calcutta, 1937, p. 408.

II.2.b Religious Causes

The *gurukula* education system and the *Vedic* religion are indebted to each other for their growth. The institutional need of a religion for its continued progress and enlargement has been fulfilled by *gurukulas*. The *gurukula* functioned as a centre for propaganda for the *Vedic* religion. Brāhmaṇical religion and culture depended upon the system of individual schools and ideal succession of teacher and disciples from its inception. The *guru* preached and taught almost every aspect of Brāhmaṇical religion and society. Then, the passed out students advertised and practiced Brāhmaṇical religion and culture outside *gurukula*. In this way, almost every aspect of Brāhmaṇical religion and culture got institutionalised in and through the *guru-śiṣya paramparā*.

Gurukulas also functioned as laboratory for the *Vedic* religion and contributed a lot in improvement and advancement of both *gurukula* education system and the *Vedic* religion. It was in *gurukulas* where the *Vedic* religion and philosophy evolved gradually after many addition and deletion. The teacher and the taught of *gurukula* were first to practice Brāhmaṇical rituals and sacrifices. It was *gurukulas* where practical has been done with the *Vedic* rituals and sacrifices. The students got training of all minute details of rituals and sacrifices through continued practical learning. In this way, some rituals became more enlarged; some rituals banished; some sacrifices were sidelined and also new rituals related to every aspect of life were introduced.

In the series of development, the importance of *gurukula* increased and it got associated with the status symbol of *Brāhmaṇas*. *Gurukulas* became a source of domination for *Brāhmaṇas* in the society. The sole custodian of *gurukula* — *Brahmins*, projected himself as the superior of all classes having the best knowledge of *Vedic* corpus, *Vedic* philosophy, religion, rituals and sacrifices. Later, they detached women *Vaiśyas* and *Śūdras* from the accessibility to *Vedic* education. It was an example of the *Brahmins* increasing spiritual, social and political power.

It is well known that rituals were given an important place in the Later *Vedic* and the Post *Vedic* periods and the priests – as performers of sacrifice – were

considered superior.¹⁹ Constructing a *yajñasālā*, i.e. a fire place with one chimney at the top for the escape of smoke, in any part of the city or suburb for the benefit of public was considered as much as meritorious a work as the erection and consecration of a temple or excavation of a tank or well, planting a tree, providing a park or building a bridge.²⁰ *Brāhmaṇas* acquired monopoly in the field of sacrifices as the sole performer of rituals pronouncing correct Sanskrit. The *gurukula* was the brainchild of new rituals and magnification of old sacrifices.

Another educational promotional activity in early India was the occasional concourse of learned men gathered together at the courts and palaces of kings by the sessions of sacrifices they used to celebrate with due liberality. It was customary in those days to arrange some interesting and instructive functions like the recitation of sacred books at some convenient hour of the day, which could be attended by public at large.²¹ It was at the snake sacrifice of Janamejaya that Vaiśampāyana recited the *Mahābhārata*. Thus the celebration of religious sacrifice was the principal agency for the promulgation and popularisation of original literary works of national interests and importance.

The *Vrātyas* of the *Vedic* tradition are the founders of the widespread Rudra-Śiva cult and the spiritual ancestors of the later and modern *Śivaites*. The *Vrātyastomas* of the ritual were performances to mark the admission within the *Brahmin* circle of such *Vrātyas*, whose addiction to the cult of Śiva in his dread forms rendered them an object of suspicion to their more orthodox fellows.²² Further, the *Vrātya* of the *Atharva Veda* is no other than *Rudra-Śiva* himself and simultaneously his earthly counterpart — the *Śivaite* ascetic. These *Vrātyas* got initial training of Brāhmaṇical religion and culture from *gurukulas*.

¹⁹ K. Meenakshi, “Linguistic and the Study of Early Indian History” in Romila Thapar (ed.), *Recent Perspectives of Early Indian History*, Revised Second Edition 1998, Popular Prakashan, Mumbai, Reprinted 2002, p. 72.

²⁰ Sris Chandra Chatterjee, *Magadha Architecture and Culture*, University of Calcutta, Calcutta, 1942, p. 6.

²¹ Santos Kumar Das, *The Economic History of Ancient India: From the Earliest Time down to the Invasion of India by Alexander the Great*, Vol. I, Second edition, Mitra Press, Calcutta, 1937, p. 391.

²² A. Berriedale Keith, “The Vratyas” *The Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Britain and Ireland*, 1913, p. 155.

There are references in *Rig Veda* that the powerful chief of *Janas* increased their power with the coalition and the confederating of individual *Janas*, such as the Kurus or the Pañchāla also reflected in titles such as *ekrāt*, *virāt* and *samrāt*.²³ The heightening of power is also associated with the performance of elaborate sacrificial rituals such as the *rājasūya*, the *aśvamedha* and the *vājapeya*. It was through these rituals that the *raja* claimed affinity and communication with divinity and was imbued with charismatic qualities, which differentiated him from the rest of the society.²⁴ These rituals were also believed to encapsulate power and thus encourage the transition to kingship. Thus, *gurukulas* as a centre of *Vedic* rituals and sacrifices got hearted support of the contemporary kings, which helped these institutions to grow in number and size.

The significance of ritual is also related to forms of knowledge, some of which have been studied in depth. There is evidence of what might be called proto-scientific knowledge in the way in which the sacrificial area was demarcated or the altar was constructed and in the anatomical; information was gathered from the cutting up of the animal as part of the ritual.²⁵ This led to evolution of geometry and anatomy. Equally important was the reciting and memorisation of *Vedic mantras*, which contributed to the understanding of the phonetics of the language, to meaning and ultimately the grammar.²⁶

II.2.c Economic Causes

The expansion of Early Indian education was closely related to the economic history of ancient India. Each stage of the economic development was related to the specific type of education started from the *Rig Vedic* to early medieval period. We also witness primitive and mature, early Indian education respectively in pastoralism

²³ K. M. Shrimali, *History of Panchala to c. A.D. 550*, Munshiram Manoharlal, Delhi, 1971, p. 48.

²⁴ J. C. Heesterman, *The Inner Conflict of Tradition*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1985, p. 102.

²⁵ D. P. Chattopadhyaya, *History of Science and Technology in Ancient India- The Beginning*, Calcutta, K. L. Mukhopadhyaya, 1986, p. 86.

²⁶ Romila, Thapar, “The First Millennium B. C. in Northern India (Up to the end of the Mauryan Period)”, in Romila Thapar (ed.), *Recent Perspectives of Early Indian History*, Revised Second Edition 1998, Popular Prakashan, Mumbai, Reprinted 2002, p. 116.

and agricultural and urbanised economy. Early Indian education was intimately related to ancient Indian traditional economic activities like *dāna* and *dakshinā*. *Dāna* and *dakshinā* as forms of exchange were not merely part of the religious ritual and symbolism but also related with changes in economic life and the contemporary social structure.²⁷ The learning centre of early Indian education – *gurukulas* – was supported by *dānas* and *dakshnā*. *Dāna* along with *dakshinā* was a voluntary payment made to *Brāhmaṇas* for their services rendered to the society. Especially Each disciple was to pay the *gurudakshinā* especially after the conclusion of his formal education as a show of respect and thanks to *guru*. The repayment was not always monetary because we have references of cow *dānas* in the *Vedic* period; wealth donations in the period of second urbanisation; and land and village grants in the Gupta and Post Gupta periods to *Brāhmaṇas*.

When the economy changed from pastoralism to agriculture in the Later *Vedic* Period, the Indo-*Āryan* speakers who were essentially pastoralists were led to depend on the non-*Āryans* as the latter had knowledge of iron tools and also the local seasons. This closer contact between these two linguistic groups resulted in increase in the number of words loaned from each other and also a change in the attitude of Indo-*Āryan* speakers toward the local population. In this context, the word for plough in Sanskrit – *lāṅgalm* – is significant. The change in economy thus led to a kind of reciprocal relation between the *Āryan* and non-*Āryan* speakers.²⁸ Early Indian education functioned as stimulus to this interdependent relationship between *Āryans* and non-*Āryans*, which resulted in the expansion of *gurukulas*.

The Post *Vedic* period witnessed the growth of agriculture through more and more use of iron tools and ploughshare. That is why a large number of iron tools and implements have been found from Ujjain, Śrāvastī and Hastināpur. In this period, the centre of economic and political activity shifted from Haryana and western Uttar Pradesh to Eastern Uttar Pradesh and Bihar, which had more rainfall, iron ore

²⁷ Romila Thapar, *Ancient Indian Social History*, Orient Longman, Delhi, 1978, pp. 105-121.

²⁸ Romila, Thapar, *From Lineage to State*, Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1984, p. 54.

resources and better fertility of land.²⁹ People started clearing thick forest cover and new lands started coming out. People started spreading in earlier unknown areas as we have references of increased number of settlements in these areas. The growth of agriculture helped *gurukulas* education system to rise in two ways. First, *gurukulas* exploited the newly settled areas by opening their branches and second, the improved food supply and better economic condition helped *gurukulas* to meet their daily needs.

The invention of Iron in around 800-700 B.C. had a direct impact on the economy. Iron axes were used to clear forests and iron ploughshares facilitated agricultural operations. This was especially useful in the middle Gangetic Valley (the areas between Allahabad and Bhagalpur) where wet rice cultivation evolved. It is a known fact that yields per acre in wet cultivation is substantially higher than those of wheat or millet in traditional agriculture. As such, there was much larger output of food grains in the rice producing middle Gangetic Valley than the wheat producing upper Gangetic Valley. It has been observed that varieties of rice and paddy fields are repeatedly mentioned in the early Buddhist texts. Larger food production made it possible to sustain increased population, which is reflected in an increase in the number of settlement in the archaeological records of this time. All this created the possibility of the emergence of social groups not engaged in food production such as the *Brāhmaṇas* and *Kṣatriyas*. Especially once the survival of *Brāhmaṇas* became sure then it stimulated the rise of *gurukulas* under the direction of *Brāhmaṇas*.

Expansion of agriculture resulted in improved food supply and helped in the development of craft production, trade and urban centres. The sixth century B.C is known as an era of ‘Second Urbanisation’ when urban centres emerged in the middle Ganga basin after the decline of the Harrapan towns. Emergence of the city was a result of two crucial processes. One was in relationship with nature i.e. by the use of iron and mastering the technique of paddy transplantation, the people of the Gangetic Valley achieved greater mastery over the process of agricultural production. The other process was the changes in the internal structure of society in the sixth century B.C.

²⁹ D. D. Kosambi, ‘The Beginning of Iron Age in India’, *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient*, Vol. 6, No. 3 (Dec., 1963), pp. 314-317.

This meant that the ruling castes like the *Kṣatriyas* and *Brāhmaṇas* along with the class of the *Gaḥapatis* extracted surplus food and other social products. It is said that more than sixty towns and cities such as Pātaliputra, Rājagrha, Śrāvastī, Varanasi, Vaisālī, Champā, Kausāmbi and Ujjain developed between 600 and 300 B.C. These cities became centres of craft production and trade, and were inhabited by a large number of artisans and merchants. These cities also attracted *Brāhmaṇas* because there was no scarcity of *dāna* and *dakshinā* in towns. It is evident that *gurukulas* developed enormously both in size and number near to these towns, which admitted rich sons of traders, merchants, artisans and warriors.

Agriculture though it remained the principal occupation but the mass of the population lost its attraction for the more arduous spirits who began to crowd into cities lured by the finery of city life by the chances of greater income by trade or employment and by other facilities. The diversity of occupations that sprang up in the *Brāhmaṇa* period became more pronounced in this epoch as is evident from the large number of functional groups. Among those who embraced learned professions we find (1) *ācārya* (teacher) some of whom taught the children of villagers and maintained by them, while other imparted higher instruction in reputed centres of learning; (2) *vejjas* (physician); (3) *viṣavaidyas* i.e. curer of poisonous bites. Then there was the army of (4) astrologers; (5) soothsayers; (6) *nimittapāthakas* (omen readers); (7) *angavidyāpāthakas* i.e. those who can read the physical features of men and women; and (8) magicians like *māyākāra*, *māyāvī* or *aindrjālīka*, who came to be condemned by Buddha as they preyed on the ignorance of the ordinary people.³⁰ It reflected the increasing importance of educational activities because these professionals were thriving. It also pulsated the expansion of *gurukula* education system for helping in producing more and more learned professionals.

Expansion of agriculture and urbanisation also developed the internal and external trade, which stimulated the learning process in early India. The surplus production of agriculture and the materials prepared by artisans in cities started moving from one place to another by trade. The use of coins/metallic money was tied

³⁰ Santosh Kumar Das, *The Economic History of Ancient India: From the Earliest Time down to the Invasion of India by Alexander the Great*, Vol. I, Second edition, Mitra Press, Calcutta, 1937, p. 239.

to this long distance trade, given the quantity of coins associated with such sites.³¹ The exchange is not only goods but also of ideas. Long distance trade is assisted by the use of script, which makes it possible to use letters of credit and promissory notes so that traders do not have to physically travel to far away places. In many cultures, the evolution of script coincides with trade and this appears to have been the case with *kharoṣṭhi* and *brāhmī* scripts.³²

It is evident that along the line of important trade routes and centres, the learning institutions such as Takṣaśīlā, Ujjain, and Varanasi etc also grew. Taxila and Ujjain provided both manufactured items and markets.³³ In the sixth century B.C., the trans-Indus region was part of the Achaemenid Empire and a town such as Takṣaśīlā have been a major funnel for trade with west Asia. In the north, the major highway was the *uttarapatha* connecting Charsada and Takṣaśīlā in the northwest to Pātaliputra, the capital of Mauryas, via Mathura, Kauśāmbi and Banaras. The metallic money extends the geographical reach of trade and brings distant centres into contact with each other. That is why Takṣaśīlā touched the peak point of early Indian education and developed as a college of *Vedic* education accommodating all vocational and literary knowledge. Thus, those interested in the profession of medicine we are told, travel from the Ganga plain to Takṣaśīlā for training.

A large number of copperplates recording land grants of the period between the fourth and the seventh centuries of the Christian era describe two groups of land, which can be roughly divided into two groups — communal and individual.³⁴ The whole community of the village or the locality for the communal benefit owns communal land. The communally owned lands lying outside the village have been

³¹ M. K. Dhavalikar, “The Beginning of Coinage in India” *World Archaeology*, Vol.6, pp.330-38.

³² Romila, Thapar, “The First Millennium B. C. in Northern India (Up to the end of the Mauryan Period)”, in Romila Thapar (ed.), *Recent Perspectives of Early Indian History*, Revised Second Edition 1998, Popular Prakashan, Mumbai, Reprinted 2002, p. 123.

³³ J. Marshall, *Taxila: An illustrated Account of Archaeological Excavations Carried out at Taxila under the Order of the Government of India between the Years 1913 and 1934*, Vol. I, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1951, p. 102.

³⁴ Sudhir Ranjan Das, “Types of Land in North-Eastern India (From 4th century to 7th century AD)” in Brajadulal Chattopadhyaya (ed.), *Essays in Ancient Indian Economic History*, Indian History Congress, Golden Jubilee Year Publication Series, Vol.II, Munshiram Manoharlal, New Delhi, 1987, p. 62.

described in the inscriptions as *vana*, *aranya*, and *jāṅgala-bhūmi*.³⁵ It is clear from the inscriptions that the king is the owner of these lands and we often find him granting these lands for converting them into habitable or dwelling places.³⁶ According to Kauṭilya, such lands can be granted to the *Brāhmaṇas* for the cultivation of *dharma*. This is also clear from the Tippera inscription of Lokānatha where we have a reference to the establishment of 211 *Brāhmaṇas* versed in the *Vedas* in *aṭvai-bhūkhaṇḍa* in *Suvvaṅga viṣaya*.³⁷ The areas settled by *Brāhmaṇas* became centre of learning of early Indian education.

II.3. The Method of Instruction

As in the age of four *Vedas*, the students were admitted to the *Vedic* schools after the performance of the *Upanayana* ceremony (this marked the entrance of the pupil into the house of his teacher for learning) at the age of 12 and spent as many years at the residence of their teachers as *brahmācharis*.³⁸ The first testimony for instruction in the *gurukula* is found in the *Rig Veda* where the seasonal croaking of frogs is placed in correlation with the exchange between chanting *Brahmins*.³⁹ Before the introduction of writing, the pupil learnt by listening and memorising the recitations of the master — a laborious and prolonged process. And when they had books, they were read aloud until they were known by heart. Thus, receiving of tradition from the lips of a master was necessarily the form of all teaching. The *Vedic* scholars could be asked anytime by his peers to recite a certain portion of their sacred text and demonstrate his competence. The highest knowledge was built, acquired, conserved and transmitted up by these *ṛishis* or teachers, who revealed and stored up the knowledge in the hymns often after discussion at the assemblies that were held on some sacrificial occasions.

³⁵ R. Shamasastri (trans.), *Kauṭilya's Arthaśāstra*, Mysore Printing and Publication, Mysore, 1960, p. 54.

³⁶ J. F. Fleet, *Inscriptions of Early Gupta Kings and their Successors*, Corpus Inscriptionum Indicarum 3, Indological Book House, Baranasi, 1970, p. 289.

³⁷ *Epigraphica Indica*, Vol. XV, pp. 307-311.

³⁸ Dr. Sudhakar Chattopadhyaya, *Social Life in Ancient India (in the background of Yajñavalkya-smṛiti)*, Academic Publishers, Calcutta, 1st edition, 1965, pp. 35-36.

³⁹ *Rig Veda Samhita*, VII, 103.

Simultaneously, the student served their teacher by begging alms for him, collecting fuel from the forest for the sacrificial fires and looking after the cattle grazing on the pasture.⁴⁰ The external duties in the form of services to the teacher were meant to instill in the student those mental and moral attributes, which would help him to receive the highest knowledge: the knowledge of the *Brahma*, the social subject matter of the *Upaniṣads*. There was no final examination. Classes were small, and teacher and students were in daily and personal contact and communication, affording the teacher a good appreciation of his students' progress (or lack of it).⁴¹ This *guru-śiṣya paramparā* was the basic feature of Pre-Nālandā education, which is still a goal of modern education.

The discipline was gentle and only in the extreme cases was there any severity. Manu says, "Good instruction must be given to pupils without unpleasant sensations, and the teacher who reverences virtue must use sweet and gentle words. If a scholar is guilty of a fault, his instructor may punish him with severe words, and threaten that on the next offence he will give him blows, and, if the fault is committed in cold weather, the teacher may dowse him with cold water".⁴²

II.4. The Sessions

It is very unique that the study sessions in the *gurukulas* had much similarity with modern education in the terms of its semester wise study. It was also about six months of study period. The school term opened solemnly with the performance of a special ceremony called *Upakarma* on the full moon of the month of *Sravana* (July-August) and continued until the full moon of *Pausha* (December-January) when it was solemnly closed with the performance of the *Utsarjana* ceremony, after which the *brahmācharin* had to leave off learning the *Veda*. However, the *brahmācharin* had to recapitulate what he had learnt from his teacher in the next five or six months till

⁴⁰ Suresh Chandra Ghosh, *The History of Education in Ancient India c. 3000 BC to AD 1192*, Munshiram Manoharlal, New Delhi, 2001, p. 35.

⁴¹ Scharfe Hartmut, *Education in Ancient India*, in the series of Handbook of Oriental Studies edition J. Bronkhorst, Section two, Vol. 16, Koninklijke Brill NV, Leiden, The Netherlands, 2002, p. 291.

⁴² *Manu-Samhita*, II, 23; S. S. Laurie, The History of *Āryan* Education III: The *Āryan* or Indo European Races, *The School Review*, Vol. 1, No.10 (December 1983), p. 682.

the school term opened again in the month of *Sravana*.⁴³ With the opening of the new session of the school when the names of those who had contributed most of the study of *Vedas* and the allied subjects were gratefully recalled, the *brahmācharin* began to learn from his teacher a fresh part of the *Veda* and other subjects. It is quite observable here that the next six months period after the study was fixed for recapitulation of their last knowledge.

II.5. The Curriculum

The subject of learning in the *gurukulas* shows the nature, extent and variety of the ancient Indian education system. It is very interesting that the curriculum of these *gurukulas* was not static and always reviewed and renewed. It was continuously changing and getting expanded according to the new developments in society and religion and the new creation of knowledge. The study of any subject carried on with sufficient attention, necessary motive and in graded steps, not only imparted proficiency in that line but also trained up the mental powers for general use and application in other branches as well. We can divide these subjects in two categories for study viz. religious and non-religious or secular.

II.5.a. Religious Courses

The interesting thing about the religious courses is that the creation of religious scriptures was a continuous process and respectively new texts were getting added in the curriculum. By 600 B.C., the subject of learning in the *Vedic* schools was the hymns of the four *Vedas*. These hymns were to be uttered correctly by bringing out their meaning clearly. And for this specific purpose, all these subsidiary studies or auxiliary sciences – *siksha* or phonetics, *Kalpa* or ritual, *Jyotisha* or astronomy, *Chhanda* or prosody, *vyakarana* or grammar and *nirukta* or etymology – were developed in the *Vedic* schools as aids to the study of the *Vedas* and were known as *Vedāngas* or the limbs of the *Vedas*.⁴⁴ These had to be studied as aids to the comprehension of the meaning of the *Vedic* text upon which so much stress were laid. Besides such courses, it now included *Nyaya* and *Mimamsa*, *Ithihasa-Purāṇa*, *Gatha*,

⁴³ Suresh Chandra Ghosh, *The History of Education in Ancient India c. 3000 BC to AD 1192*, Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers Pvt. Ltd., New Delhi, 2001, pp. 74-75.

⁴⁴ *The Ordinances of Manu*, II, 10.

Rasi, Daiva, Nidhi, Kayana and a whole range of *vidyās* including *Kshatravidyā, Nakshatriyavidyā, Bhutavidyā, Sarpavidyā, Devavidyā, Brahnavidyā* and *Devajana-vidyā*, many of which could be traced to the *Atharvaveda* — the last of the four *Vedas*.⁴⁵

In the course of time say by the time of *Sutra* Age (c. 400-200 B.C.), the course of study not only included the four *Vedas* with the six *Angas* but also the *rahasyas* or the esoteric treatises such as the *Brāhmanas*, the *Aranyakas* or the *Upaniṣads*. They gave birth to a number of independent and allied sciences like Philosophy and *Yoga*, Grammar and Philology, Anatomy and Physiology, medicine, veterinary medicine, tree care, statecraft, law, aesthetics, Arithmetic, Algebra and Geometry, Astrology and Astronomy, Music and Songs, sculpture and painting and countless others; some with direct practical applications: others more theoretical. An older listing of fourteen sciences was later expanded to eighteen,⁴⁶ which was still serving the end of *Āryan* religion. The *vyakarana* or grammar developed as an independent science – as reflected in Panini's *Ashtadhyayi* or eight chapters – which laid down the rules applicable to the language of the *Vedas*, which now is known as *Sanskrita* or refined.

The *Sutra* Age represents a tremendous growth and development in philosophy, and Law and *Angas*. The six systems of philosophy have come to be distinguished as orthodox systems from the heterodox philosophical systems of the Buddhists, Jains and *Chārvakas* as they are somehow reconcilable with the *Vedic* system of philosophy. They are: (1) the *Śāmkhya* of Kapila (2) *Yoga* of Patañjali, (3) *Nyaya* of Gautama (4) *Vaisesika* of Kanada, (5) *Karma* or *Purva Mimamsa* of Jamini, and (6) *Sariraka* or *Uttara Mimamsa* or *Vedānta* of Badarayana. The foundation of these six different schools of philosophy rest on a common system

⁴⁵ Suresh Chandra Ghosh, *The History of Early Indian Education c.3000 to AD 1192*, Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers, New Delhi, 2001, p. 37.

⁴⁶ P. V. Kane, *History of Dharmasastra*, Vol. II, Part II, Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, Poona 1930-62, second edition, 1968-75, p. 355.

known as *varnāśramadharmā* i.e. the regulations belonging to the different *āśramas* or stages of life in the *Āryan* society.⁴⁷

We have till now been discussing the accessibility of the courses offered at the *Vedic* schools to the different classes of the *Āryan* society. In the words of *Mundakopaniṣada*, this knowledge – technically called *Aparāvidyā*, as distinguished from all other knowledge termed as *Parāvidyā* – is that knowledge through which the ultimate reality is known.⁴⁸ They had to search for gurus to obtain this secret knowledge and this could involve them in traveling from one part of the country to another. And how was the knowledge of *atman* taught to a disciple by a teacher? The answer is by discourses (illustrations, stories and parables), dialogues, questions and answers. How could this knowledge be acquired? The acquisition of this knowledge involves annihilation of all desires and illusions of a manifold universe or consciousness of plurality through *sannyāsa* and *yoga*.⁴⁹

II.5.b. Non-religious or Secular Courses

The *Sutra* age also saw the emergence of some new disciplines to meet the requirements of a particular class in a society. Since such disciplines developed independently of the *gurukula* system, which centred round the *Āryan* religion, these could be termed as non-religious or secular. One such subject is the study of statecraft or treatise on governance, and the most outstanding work of the age is Kauṭilya's *Arthaśāstra*.⁵⁰ Other examples are *Ayurvedic*, military science, and various arts and crafts whose origin can be traced to the metrical hymns of the *Atharva Veda*, which presumably was composed around 800 B.C.

⁴⁷ Suresh Chandra Ghosh, *The History of Education in Ancient India c. 3000 BC to AD 1192*, Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers Pvt. Ltd., New Delhi, 2001, p. 80.

⁴⁸ Santos Kumar Das, *The Education System of The Ancient Hindus*, Gyan Publication, New Delhi, reprinted 1996, pp. 20-23.

⁴⁹ A. S. Geden (trans.), *Philosophy of the Upanishads* by Paul Deussen, Oriental Publishers, Delhi, 1972, pp. 121-129; and Santos Kumar Das, *The Education System of The Ancient Hindus*, Gyan Publishers, New Delhi, reprinted 1996, p. 139.

⁵⁰ R. P. Kangle (trans.), *The Kautīlīya Arthaśāstra*, Part I & II, University of Bombay Studies Sanskrit, Prakrit and Pali, No. 2, Bombay, first edition, 1963, second edition, 1972.

The foremost among these subjects as indicated above was the *Ayurvedic* medicine. Strabo says: “The Indians do not pursue accurate knowledge in any line, except medicine”.⁵¹ The interest in the subject may be traced partly to the sacrifice of the living being as well as partly to the Yoga or meditation. *Ayurvedic* medicine was one of the most important programmes of study at *Vedic* schools at Takṣaśīlā where Charaka taught *Ayurvedic* medicine in the first century.⁵² The study of *Ayurvedic* medicine including a six months probationary period according to *Susruta Samhita* lasted nearly seven years and was open to all classes including the Sudras. However, all candidates for admission to this programme were required to be physically fit and mentally sound with good morals and manners such as courage, intelligence, patience, tenacity, capacity, humility and generosity.⁵³ *Ayurveda* had to two aspects – theory and practice – and both aspects were studied simultaneously under the careful eye of a teacher. The *Ayurvedic* medicine consisted of diverse disciplines, such as pathology, medicine, tericology, blood test, bones, snakebite and surgery; and the students were expected to master different disciplines.⁵⁴ A king’s license or authorisation from him was required before one could start practicing medicine. An unsuccessful student in medicine practicing it without an authorization was liable to be punished by the king. It is obvious that such authorisation was issued only on the recommendation or the certification by a teacher for his student who had successfully followed a prescribed course in *Ayurveda* under him.⁵⁵ Whether there were provisions for hospitals as in modern times for studying the practical aspect of *Ayurvedic* medicine, we do not know. However, the existence of charitable dispensaries, where persons were treated for free – as noted by Fa-hien as late as fifth century A.D. – in big cities like Pātaliputra could possibly fill in the gap.

⁵¹ John W. Macrindle, *Ancient India as Described in Classical Literature*, Philo, Amsterdam, 1971, p.25.

⁵² *Mahāvagga* II, VIII, 3.

⁵³ *Mahāvagga* II, VIII, 26, 6 and 8.

⁵⁴ Santos Kumar Das, *The Education System of The Ancient Hindus*, Gyan Publication, New Delhi, reprinted 1996, p. 217.

⁵⁵ Suresh Chandra Ghosh, *The History of Education in Ancient India c. 3000 BC to AD 1192*, Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers Pvt. Ltd., New Delhi, 2001, pp. 90-95.

The courses on warfare were also regularly taught at *Vedic* school at Takṣaśīlā. Elephant lore, horsemanship, cavalry training and use of contemporary weapons including bows and arrows were taught at Takṣaśīlā. However the military schools at Takṣaśīlā required a fee about 1000 pieces of coin, silver or copper, which only the members of the royal families and affluent classes like merchants and traders could afford it. It is therefore obvious that the majority of the *Āryans*, who were willing to take up this profession, were unable to pay the required fee and also to undertake an expensive and hazardous journey to the extreme of northwest.⁵⁶

The contemporary religious literatures of the *Āryans*, both Brāhmanical and Buddhist, put the total number of arts and crafts described as *kalas* at sixty-four. These sixty-four arts and crafts cover all aspects and all needs and requirements of the emerging *Āryan* civilization such as painting, music, dancing, architecture, sculpture, cooking, preparing drinks, washing, constructing ships, chariot, weapons etc. However for most of the crafts, there was the traditional system of learning through *guru-śiṣya paramparā*, which at present goes by the name of “apprenticeship” among us. The rules of apprenticeship as given by Nārada in *Dharmaśāstra* indicate that admission to a craft was free and open to all.⁵⁷ In this apprenticeship system, the master shall teach him in his house and feed him. And he must not employ him in a work of different description, and should not treat him like a son. While the home of the artisan functioned as the school, the collective interests of the craft as a whole, in a particular area, were administered by an organisation called *shreni* or guild such as guilds of artists and dancers, cultivators, traders, artisans etc.⁵⁸ Each guild had its own rules to administer its craft. Thus, all guilds may be taken to function like schools of fine Arts and crafts in those days.⁵⁹

⁵⁶ Suresh Chandra Ghosh, *The History of Education in Ancient India c. 3000 BC to AD 1192*, Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers Pvt. Ltd., New Delhi, 2001, pp. 95-96.

⁵⁷ For details see, Santos Kumar Das, *The Education System of The Ancient Hindus*, Gyan Publication, New Delhi, reprinted 1996, p. 207-209.

⁵⁸ Paul Masson-Oursel, Helena De William-Grabowska and Philippe Stern (eds.), *Ancient India and Indian Civilization*, translated from French by M. R. Dobie, first edition in India, Lakshmi Book Store, New Delhi, 1967, p. 112.

⁵⁹ R. C. Majumdar, *Corporate Life in Ancient India*, 3rd edition, K. L. Mukhopadhyay Firma, Calcutta, 1969, p. 68.

II.6. Access of Vedic Education

The offer of variety of courses of study does not make an educational system successful, but it depends upon its accessibility to the maximum classes of that particular society. In this way, we can evaluate early Indian education as either universal or reserved for dominant classes of the society. Regarding this we can say that as the early society was getting regulated and strict on the consciousness of class respectively, the access to the education was getting more and more limited. In the beginning, in *Vedic Age*, when society was open and not very rigid in class consciousness, the access to this education was open for all four classes viz. *Brāhmaṇa*, *Kṣatriya*, *Vaiśya* and *Śūdra*. Except for the *Brāhmaṇas* who mastered the four *Vedas*, the other three classes were possibly instructed in the same way as the women were, to participate in the religious life of the *Āryans*. As a matter of fact, the *Yajurveda* enjoins the imparting of *Vedic* knowledge to all classes; *Brāhmaṇas*, *Rajanyas*, *Śūdras*, *Vaiśyas*, *Ānāryas* and *Charanas*. The *Rigveda* besides including Visvamitra, a *Kṣatriya* under the mandalas II to VII, as one of the six *ṛishis*, preserves the names of several *ṛishis* like Ambarisha, Sindhudvipa, Sindhukshit, Sudas, Mandhata, Sibi, as well as Pratardana of Kāsī who were originally kings or *Kṣatriyas*.

After the *Vedic Age*, unlike the *Brāhmaṇa* and the *Kṣatriyas*, the religious literature of the age did not throw any light at all on the intellectual attainment of these two classes — the *Vaiśyas* and the *Śūdras*. However, though they had now no or little access to the religious scripture of the time, most of them were involved in some of the contemporary arts and crafts like dancing, singing, playing on musical instruments, perfumery, dyeing and the like. In the *Sutra* age, everybody except perhaps the *Śūdras* was required to go to a *Vedic* school and *Veda* study had to be halted whenever a *Śūdra* came within earshot.⁶⁰ Also students were admitted after an enquiry into their *vamsha* or family of birth, individual merits and capability to serve and venerate their teachers, who were called gurus, *ācāryas* or Preceptors.⁶¹ As a

⁶⁰ A. S. Altekar, *Education in Ancient India*, India Book Shop, Benaras, 1934, p. 46.

⁶¹ R. P. Singh, *A Critique of Indian Education (Developing Insights)*, Ravi Books, Delhi, first edition 2002, p. 300.

matter of fact, the knowledge of highest kind at *gurukulas* were not to be imparted to one who was not calm and tranquil in spirit and not trained in the cultivate language.⁶²

The system of *brahmācharya* also covered the women who were admitted to the *Vedic* schools after the performance of the *Upanayana* ceremony. They were given prescribed courses of study in the *Vedas* to enable them to assist their husbands in the sacrificial offerings.⁶³ The ambition of a father was often to see his daughter grow into a learned woman and get a comparably suitable husband in a learned man.⁶⁴ The age of four *Vedas* produced many women sages called *ṛishikas* and *brahmavadinis* like Romasa, Lopmudra, Apala, Kadru, Visvavara, Ghosa, Juhu, Jarita, Urvasi, Yami, Indrani, Savitri, Devajani, Nodh and Gaupayana. Up to the *Upaniṣhad* age (600 B.C.), the social position of women was high enough. After this their education was neglected but the women of highest classes of society such as courtesans, priests, kings etc. were trained in arts and crafts and taught in religious literatures in the urban areas.⁶⁵

The extent of literacy in Indian antiquity is very difficult to imagine. Altekar⁶⁶ concluded from the obligatory *upanayana* of the twice-born *Āryas* in *Vedic* society that with their subsequent study they became literate and he estimated literacy among the three upper classes in the first millennium B.C. at eighty percents (including even girls). In the next millennium, Altekar saw a decline in the observation of *upanayana*, and he inferred a decrease in literacy to forty percentages in A.D. 800.

⁶² Santos Kumar Das, *The Education System of The Ancient Hindus*, Gyan Publication, New Delhi, reprinted 1996, p. 49.

⁶³ R. K. Mookerji, *Ancient Indian Education: Brāhmanical and Buddhism*, second edition, Macmillan, London, 1951, p. 51.

⁶⁴ P. V. Kane, *History of Dharmasastra*, Vol.II, Part II, Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, p. 366; A. S. Altekar, *Education in Ancient India*, India Book Shop, Benaras, 1934, p. 215.

⁶⁵ Brij Narain Sharma, *Social Life in Northern India (A.D. 600-1000)*, with a foreword by Dr. A. L. Basam, Munshiram Manoharlal, Delhi, 1966, pp. 74-76.

⁶⁶ A. S. Altekar, *Education in Ancient India*, India Book Shop, Benaras, 1934, pp. 176.

II.7. Teachers

As we have discussed above, the teacher was the centre of the early education system because he was the only man who composed and uttered the hymns. We all know that the ancients had a great love for learning that is why they equated the teacher with the divine supreme power with great respect. So, what qualities did teachers have in this education system? A teacher had to be ‘truthful, kind and compassionate besides being reflective.’ He had to possess the highest moral and spiritual qualifications and to be well-versed in the sacred lore and dwelling in the *Brāhmaṇa* or the *brahmanishtha*.⁶⁷ He had to illuminate the inner beings of his pupils with his own spiritual enlightenment otherwise it would be like the blind leading the blind. A teacher had to teach his pupils the truth exactly as he knew it and it was the natural desire of every teacher that the truth he had discovered should live after him in his pupils through a succession of teachers, *guru-paramparā*, and thereby would contribute to the continuity of knowledge. If a teacher found that he was not quite fit to teach any of his students on a particular subject, he considered it to be his duty and responsibility to send him to a fitter teacher. Similarly, if a teacher found that the student was not fit to acquire the knowledge he came for, he could withhold his instructions to him.⁶⁸

Which classes did the teacher belong to? Normally and usually as in the days of four *Vedas*, the teachers were all *Brāhmaṇas* and came from the priestly class such as: Asvala or Auddalaki, Gargi Vachnavi, Gotama Rahugana, Kamalayana, Krishna Devakiputra, Maitreyi, Satyakama, Javala, Sukesi Bharadvaja, Yajñavalkya, Uddalaka Aruni etc. However, a *Kṣatriyas*’s status through the attainment of divine knowledge could be elevated, usually a king or by a *Brāhmaṇa* teacher. We have examples of learned kings who had acquired supreme knowledge and who acted as teachers even to *Brāhmaṇa* students viz. *Kṣatriya* kings Aśwapati Kaikeya, Janaka of Videha, Ajātaśatru of Kāśī, Pravahana Jaibali of Pañchāla.⁶⁹

⁶⁷ R. P. Singh, *A Critique of Indian Education (Developing Insights)*, Ravi Books, Delhi, first edition, 2002, p. 299.

⁶⁸ Suresh Chandra Ghosh, *The History of Education in Ancient India c.3000 BC to AD 1192*, Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers, New Delhi, 2001, p. 36.

⁶⁹ Hartmut Scharfe, *Education in Ancient India*, in the series of Handbook of Oriental Studies edition J. Bronkhorst, Section two, Vol. 16, Koninklijke Brill NV, Leiden, The Netherlands, 2002, pp. 195-196.

There are hymns to suggest that the education of the girls were not neglected but girls were also declared to be better teachers than their male counterparts. The *Atharvaveda* has a hymn 11/15/8 endorsed by the *Yajurveda* in the hymn 12/59 and the *Rigveda* says the same in 10/109/4 that “the girl who wishes to practice a single *Veda*, or two or three or four *Vedas* and four *Vedāngas* besides being an expert in grammar can become herself a scholarly teacher for the benefit of other girls.”⁷⁰

In the *Sutra* Age, there seems to have emerged a gradation of teachers known as *Ācārya* and *Upādhyāya*. *Ācārya* who was ten times more venerable than the *Upādhyāya* was the chief among all *gurus* or teachers. Manu defines *Ācārya* as one who initiated a pupil and taught him the *Veda*, together with the *kalpa* and *rahsayas*. Having initiated as per *Vidyārambha samskāra* he who makes a student conversant with *Veda* in entirety i.e. the preliminary branches of knowledge alphabet etc. in entirety is *ācārya*. *Ācārya* is so called because he imparts traditional percept because he systematically arranges the various objects of knowledge because he systematically develops the intellectual faculty.⁷¹ *Upādhyāya* is defined as one who taught only a portion of the *Veda* or the *Angas* to his students “for a fee” or “for his livelihood” according to Manu.⁷² In fact, it was one of the obligations of the *brahmācharin* to bring to a close the period of his formal pupillage by making presents to his teacher. Such parting gifts to the *Ācārya* which depended on the economic ability of a student and his parent often took shape, in the words of Manu, of “a field, a cow, a horse, a parasol and shoes, a seat, grain, even vegetables” and when anyone of these were presented to a teacher, it gave immense pleasure to him.⁷³

It is possible that many of the *Upādhyāya* who taught “for livelihood” could have come from the class other than *Brāhmaṇas* for some of the *Sutrakaras* of the age

⁷⁰ R. P. Singh, *A Critique of Indian Education (Developing Insights)*, Ravi Books, Delhi, first edition 2002, p. 303.

⁷¹ Dr. Sudarshan Kumar Sharma, “Vidyā, Veda - their Genesis, Scope and Illustration” in Vijay V. Bedekar (ed.), *Education in Ancient India*, Shri S. B. Velankar Felicitation Volume, paper presented at the Seminar Conducted on 25 April 1995 at Thane under the auspices of the Institute of Oriental Studies, Itihas Patrika Prakashan, Thane, 1996, p. 32.

⁷² *Manu Samhita*, 140, 141, 145.

⁷³ *The Ordinances of Manu*, II, 242 and 246.

mention the existence of non-*Brāhmaṇa* teachers. Manu says: “in times of distress (a student) may learn (the *Veda*) from one who is not a *Brāhmaṇa* and that he shall walk behind and serve (such a) teacher as long as the instruction lasts.”⁷⁴ This shows that teaching as a profession was attracting classes other than the *Brāhmaṇas* and also in the *Rig Vedic* Age the class in which a person was born did not determine the adoption of a profession. This relaxation of the rule of the previous age in education was possibly due to the challenge of Buddhism, which could boast of teachers coming from different classes of the *Āryan* society.

II.8. *Brahmācharis* life in the *Gurukulas*

Every student got admission in the *gurukula* with the *upanayana* ceremony and was known as *vrātacharis* or *brahmācharis*. The period of their studentship at such schools was known as *brahmācharya*. The normal age of *upanayana* was 8 for a *Brāhmaṇa*, eleven for a *Kṣatriya* and twelve for a *Vaiśya* and the corresponding maximum age for it was 16 for a *Brāhmaṇa*, twenty-two for a *Kṣatriya* and twenty-four for a *Vaiśya*.⁷⁵ The ages were fixed in accordance with the different capacities and aptitudes for learning, which varied from class to class. They spent usually twelve years in studying *Vedas*, leading self-controlled lives and serving their gurus. In the *Sutra* Age, there was a change related to the beginning of a child’s education or *vidyārambha* (child offering worship to the deities, Hari, Lakshmi and Śrāvastī as well as to the *vidyā* cultivated by his family, the *Sutrakaras* of that particular *vidyā* and the *vidyā* or subject of his choice), which now started at the fifth year of his age.⁷⁶ A few years after, the *Vidyārambha* ceremony were performed after *chhudakarma* or tonsure of head. In a long hymn, the *Atharvaveda* gives us an insight into the rigorous discipline that was *brahmācharya*.⁷⁷

⁷⁴ *Manu*, II. 241-243 but Yajñavalkya is absolutely silent on the above issue. See also Dr. Sudhakar Chattopadhyaya, *Social Life in Ancient India (in the background of Yajñavalkya-smriti)*, Academic Publishers, Calcutta, first edition, 1965, p. 39.

⁷⁵ *Yajñavalkya Smriti*, 1, 37.

⁷⁶ *Manu*, II, 37; P.V. Kane, *History of Dharmasastra*, Vol.II, Part II, Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, Poona 1930-62, second edition, 1968-75, p. 275.

⁷⁷ *Hymns of the Atharvaveda*, XI and V.

A *brahmāchari* had to undergo a twofold course of discipline comprising of transmission of knowledge and the moulding of the character.⁷⁸ Every day the students started recitation of the *Vedic* texts before the birds started chirping — announcing the break of the day. It included offering fuel to *Agni* and worshipping him twice daily, controlling senses, practicing austerities, living a dedicated life and satisfying the teachers. For those students who wanted to enter family life, the period of *brahmācharya* formally came to end with the completion of their courses at the *Vedic* schools. But for those who wanted to pursue knowledge like a sinking star beyond the utmost bound of human thought, *brahmācharya* continued as before. Thus *brahmācharya* at the *Vedic* school was characterized by *srama* or self-restraint, *tapas* or penance and *diksha* or consecration.

After the end of *Vedic* study, the returning home of the student is marked by a solemn ceremony known as *Samāvartana* (or also *snāna* or *āplavana* “bath” denoting different aspects of this rite) first mentioned in the *Śatapatha-brāhmana* and in the *Chāndogya Upaniṣad*. There was no definite age for this ritual. The duration of the student life varied with different courses and student.⁷⁹ The student had to perform or go through several activities signifying the end of his *brahmācharya* or studentship before he left his school.⁸⁰ In the first place, the *brahmācharya* was confined in a room in the morning lest his superior lustre put to shame the sun that shines in the lustre borrowed of him. At midday, he would come out of the room, shave his head and beard and take a bath accompanied by the use of powder, perfumes, ground sandalwood and like – all presented to him by his friends and relatives – and then throw into the water all the external signs of the *brahmācharya* such as the upper and lower garments, girdle, staff and skin.⁸¹ After the bath he would become a *snātaka* or a graduate or one who has taken a bath, wearing new garments, two ear-rings, and a

⁷⁸ B. G. Gokhale, *Ancient India History and Culture*, Asia Publishing House, Bombay, first edition, 1952, reprinted 1970, p. 140.

⁷⁹ A. S. Altekar, *Education in Ancient India*, India Book Shop, Benaras, 1934, pp. 311-312.

⁸⁰ Scharfe Hartmut, *Education in Ancient India*, in the series of Handbook of Oriental Studies edition J. Bronkhorst, Section two, Vol.16, Koninklijke Brill NV, Leiden, The Netherlands, 2002, p. 290.

⁸¹ *The Ordinances of Manu*, II, 26.

perforated pellet of sandalwood overlaid with gold which was to bring him gain, superiority in battles and assemblies at its aperture.⁸²

II.9. The Objectives of Education

As we know till now from above ongoing discussion, Pre-Nālandā education was characterised by a series of religious and vocational courses, which was always getting modified according to the needs, requirements and developments of ancient society. This continuous review in curriculum and emerging new trends were very much related with the final goal of this education system. Most of the western educationists understood that ancient Indian education was concerned with religious, ritual and philosophic matters. Thus it is not surprising that they announced the ultimate goal of education in religious terms.⁸³ In the earlier *Vedic* texts it was the attainment of heaven and the lustre of *Brāhmaṇa* (*Brahman-varcasa*); later the release or liberation from bondage i.e. *moksha* became prominent.⁸⁴ In broad sense, *moksha* means the freedom from the bond of death and becoming one with God forever or a merger with absolute reality.

Besides this starting goal, we can say that the objectives of the *gurukulas* education were the three qualities of (1) sharpening the intellect (2) formation of character (3) the attainment of social efficiency, for they helped in the attainment of *trivargasamanvaya*, i.e. the balance of *dharma*, *artha* and *kāma*.⁸⁵ The study of yoga and other meditation techniques demanded severe spiritual and restraint exercises, and philosophy aimed to further shape the student's character. Early Indian education pursued the formation of the ideal character, the preservation of the ancestral heritage including customs and social conventions, and many secular skills. The pre-Nālandā education system provided a cohesive force for the contemporary society through the

⁸² Suresh Chandra Ghosh, *The History of Education in Ancient India c. 3000 BC to AD 1192*, Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers Pvt. Ltd., New Delhi, 2001, p. 77.

⁸³ Scharfe Hartmut, *Education in Ancient India*, in the series of Handbook of Oriental Studies edition J. Bronkhorst, Section two, Vol.16, Koninklijke Brill NV, Leiden, The Netherlands, 2002, p. 47.

⁸⁴ *Rig Veda Sanhita*, VIII, 67.18 and 40.8.

⁸⁵ Brij Narain Sharma, *Social Life in Northern India (A.D. 600-1000)*, with a foreword by Dr. A.L. Basam, Munshiram Manoharlal, Delhi, pp. 74-76. Also see Santos Kumar Das, *The Education System of The Ancient Hindus*, Gyan Publication, New Delhi, reprinted 1996, p. 19.

teaching of dharma or paradigm of proper behaviour to all its students. Then its ultimate goal was to produce a student with full of all qualities through a 12 years vivid study such as spiritual, vocational, scholarly, generosity, morality etc. As in the *Sutra Age* when education developed as a profession then this education system produced many *snātaka* or graduate who were fit for the teachers' job.

II.10. Output of Gurukula Education

The early part of the history of education, say from 1500 B.C. to the beginning of the Christian era, saw an outburst of creative activities. It was an age of intellectual freedom where the desire to know natural affairs and to provide an explanation was at peak point, which in return led to the creation of new frontiers of knowledge. These new frontiers were related to all fields of knowledge and especially there was flood in the generation of religious and spiritual knowledge. Brāhmaṇism rejuvenated itself through the works of the *Sutrakaras* to meet the challenge of Buddhism but in the process of *Sutrakaras* canonization, it adversely affected the growth and development of original and creative ideas in future. The succeeding centuries after the birth of Jesus Christ were characterised more by a desire to preserve, explain and comment on the wisdom of the past than have any serious attempt to broaden and widen the horizon of learning by discovering a new philosophy or idea that were not in conformity with the canonised scriptures.

These were the years, which saw the composition of *Rigveda*, *Sāmaveda*, *Yajurveda* and *Atharvaveda*, *Brāhmaṇas*, *Aranyakas* and *Upaniṣads* and other literatures including *Vedāngas*.⁸⁶ These are mostly basic religious scriptures, which throw light on every aspect of our society and knowledge. As the Brāhmaṇical religion was getting complex, sometimes new and mostly the commentaries on the earlier pious books were brought out. We have books on every aspect of sacrifice and ritual from birth to death.

By *Sutra Age*, it was the needs and requirements of the developing *Āryan* society that contributed a lot in the generation of professional knowledge. Specially,

⁸⁶ M. L. Bhagi, *Ancient India: Culture and Thought*, The Indian Publication, Ambala Cantt., p. 79.

the increasing importance of rituals led to the solid development in astronomy, medicine, mathematics etc that surpassed the Greeks. The *Āryans* knew about the existence of the seven planets through observation with the naked eye and added two more to the list — *Rahu* and *Ketu*, the ascending and descending nodes of Moon. The seven planets are *Surya* or sun, *Chandra* or Moon, *Budha* or Mercury, *Sukra* or Venus, *Mangala* or Mars, *Brihaspati* or Jupiter and *Sani* or Saturn. They also knew the twenty-seven *nakshatras* or stars, which formed the constellations of these seven planets. For the purposes of the calculating the date and time of a sacrifice, the *Āryan* priestly class mainly relied on the Moon. It was the *tithi* or lunar day, which formed the basic unit of such calculations. Approximately thirty *tithes* formed a lunar month of 29 ½ days. There were two *pakshas*, *Sukla* and *Krishna*, which divided a lunar month into two halves of fifteen *tithes* each. A year consisted of 12 lunar months, which was again divided into six seasons of two months each — *Grishma* or summer, *Varṣa* or Rains, *Sarad* or autumn, *Hemanta* or Mild Winter and *Sitha* or Extreme winter. The *Āryan* priestly class also knew by the time of the *Sutra* Age that the universe was classified by five elements — earth, air, fire, water, and *akasha* or ether. These five elements were thought of as medium of five-sense impressions: earth of smell, air of feeling, fire of vision, water of taste, and ether of sound.⁸⁷

It is also very surprising to know that this basic knowledge of astronomy are still continuing and functioning in our modern villages. And still modern *pundits* or *Brāhmaṇas* in Hindu religion are practising these concepts in their ritual ceremony, which is performed for individuals from birth to death. As a matter of fact, the shaping of the *Āryan* School of learning and of its various disciplines was conterminous with the shaping of *Āryan* political organisations from tribal to monarchical. Until then *Brahmin* and *Brāhmaṇical* centres of learning received the exclusive patronage of the kings who were mostly *Kṣatriyas*.

II.11. Takṣaśīlā: The Pinnacle of Gurukula Education System

The economic issues helped Takṣaśīlā to rise as a centre of higher learning and touch the height of *gurukula* education system, which is at present located in

⁸⁷ Suresh Chandra Ghosh, *The History of Education in Ancient India c.3000 BC to AD 1192*, Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers, New Delhi, 2001, pp. 10-11.

Rawalpindi district of Punjab in Pakistan. Takṣaśīlā remained an intellectual capital of the Indian continent until the final destruction of the city by the invasion of White Huns after 455 AD. We learn from the *Jātakas* that there was a steady movement of scholars and students from different and distant parts of Benares, Rājagriha, Mithilā, Ujjenī, Kośala, Magadha, Sivi, Kuru towards Takṣaśīlā to complete the education they had in the *Vedic* schools of their native place.⁸⁸ Thus the various centre of learning in early India became affiliated, as it were to the educational centre or the college of Takṣaśīlā, which exercised a kind of intellectual suzerainty over the wide world of letters in ancient India.⁸⁹

Generally, a student entered Takṣaśīlā at the age of sixteen and resided with their teacher under a common roof where they were provided boarding, lodging and other necessities. But residence with the teacher was not a compulsory condition of studentship. Day scholars such as householders and married students were also admitted to instruction. The *Vedas* and the Eighteen *Silpas* or Arts, which included skills such as archery, hunting, magic charms and elephant lore were taught in addition to its special schools of law, medicine, and military science on account of the excellence of the learned teachers there, who were all recognised as authorities on their respective subjects.⁹⁰ The list of subjects taught at Takṣaśīlā underwent many additions over the years, with even Greek being taught there after the Alexandrian conquests. A staff of assistant masters (*piṭṭhiāchāriya*) also used to help an individual teacher. It was only the most advanced or senior pupils that were appointed as assistant masters. Sometimes the students are referred to as selecting the study of *Vedas* alone or the Arts alone. We may conveniently distinguish education in the *Vedas* as literary education and education in the Arts as scientific and technical education. There was freedom to opt courses for study because the classes and castes admitted did not always confine themselves to their traditional subject of study. There

⁸⁸ D. G. Apte, *Universities in Ancient India*, Education and Psychology Extension Series No. II, Maharaja Sayajirao University of Baroda, Gujarat, p. 11.

⁸⁹ R. K. Mookerji, *Ancient Indian Education: Brāhmanical and Buddhism*, second edition, Macmillan, London, 1951, p. 478.

⁹⁰ D. G. Apte, *Universities in Ancient India*, Education and Psychology Extension Series No. II, Maharaja Sayajirao University of Baroda, Gujarat, p. 09.

is a reference to a *Brāhmaṇa* boy choosing science for his study and another is spoken of as having gone in for liberal arts and ultimately specialized in archery.⁹¹

We learn from Pāli texts that *Brāhmaṇa* youths, Khaṭṭiya princes and sons of *setṭhi* from Rājagriha, Kāsī, Kośala and other places were of course in large numbers in comparison to sons of merchants, tailors and fisherman.⁹² Side by side with these colleges of a cosmopolitan composition, we find references to colleges of particular communities only. Sometimes teachers would have only *Brāhmaṇa* and Kshatriya pupils — all princes who were at that time in India to the number of 101.⁹³ We also read of a teacher at Takṣaśīlā whose school had on its roll only princes as pupils. Chaṇḍālas and women were not admitted as students.⁹⁴

Their teachers usually admitted the students to instruction on payment in advance of their entire tuition fees. A fixed sum seems to have been specified for the purpose at Takṣaśīlā, amounting to 1000 gold coins. In lieu of paying the fees in cash, a student was allowed to pay them in shape of services to his teacher. There was again another class of students who paid the teacher's fee from the scholarship awarded to them by the king. Generally such students would be sent as companions of the princes of their respective countries who were deputed to Takṣaśīlā for education. We read of the sons of the royal chaplains of the courts of Benares and Rājagriha accompanying their respective princes to Takṣaśīlā for their education.⁹⁵

Takṣaśīlā is perhaps best known because of its association with Chāṇakya, also known as Kauṭilya, the strategist who guided Chandragupta Maurya and assisted in the founding of the Mauryan Empire. The *Arthaśāstra* of Chāṇakya is said to have

⁹¹ R. K. Mookerji, *Ancient Indian Education: Brāhmaṇical and Buddhism*, second edition, Macmillan, London, 1951, p. 482.

⁹² Buddha Prakash, *Political and Social Movements in Ancient Punjab (From the Vedic Age up to the Maurya Period)*, Motilal Banarsidass, New Delhi, 1964, p. 141.

⁹³ R. K. Mookerji, *Ancient Indian Education: Brāhmaṇical and Buddhism*, second edition, Macmillan, London, 1951, p. 484.

⁹⁴ *Ibid*, p. 482.

⁹⁵ R. K. Mookerji, *Ancient Indian Education: Brāhmaṇical and Buddhism*, second edition, Macmillan, London, 1951, p. 480.

been composed in Takṣaśīlā itself.⁹⁶ The *Ayurvedic* healer Charaka also studied at Takṣaśīlā and he also started teaching at Takṣaśīlā in the later period.⁹⁷ The ancient grammarian Panini, who codified the rules that would define Classical Sanskrit, has also been part of the community at Takṣaśīlā. Jīvaka, the famous physician of Bimbisāra who cured the Buddha, learnt the science of medicine at Takṣaśīlā and on his return was appointed court-physician at Magadha.⁹⁸ Another illustrious product of Takṣaśīlā was the enlightened ruler of Kośala – Prasenajit – who is intimately associated with the events of the time of Buddha.⁹⁹

II.12. The Mahāvihāra Education System

After above-mentioned details of the *gurukula* education, we will now look into the *mahāvihāra* education system, another important part of early Indian education. We will concentrate on similarities and differences between this Brāhmaṇical and Buddhist education to understand them. Here a general introduction of the *mahāvihāra* education system will also be presented but we shall go into the details of its evolution and structure in the subsequent chapters. The history of *mahāvihāra* education system is interrelated with the Buddha or Buddhist religion. Gautama, the Buddha revolted against the prevalent Brāhmaṇical religion and education system. The monasteries and *vihāras* took the place of sacrificial altars and as a result, these places became the centres of cultural life. Thus the method of these monasteries was the educational method of that time. Buddhist education helped India to gain international importance. It also developed cultural exchange between India and other countries of the world.

The history of Buddhist *vihāras* in ancient India commences from the sixth century B.C. and relates a connected tale of their gradual evolution and ornamentation. *Vihāra* is a place of living, stay, and more precisely an abode for a

⁹⁶ R. K. Mookerji, *Ancient Indian Education: Brāhmaṇical and Buddhism*, second edition, Macmillan, London, 1951, p. 17.

⁹⁷ Ibid, p. 479.

⁹⁸ *Mahāvagga*, viii, 1.3.6.

⁹⁹ Buddha Prakash, *Political and Social Movements in Ancient Punjab (From the Vedic Age up to the Maurya Period)*, Motilal Banarsidass, New Delhi, 1964, p. 141.

Buddhist mendicant. Sometimes the words ‘*Ārāma*’ and ‘*Vihāra*’ are synonymous.¹⁰⁰ In Pāli, the word ‘*Ārāma*’ has been used largely in connection with a residence for monks; hence it signifies a monastery.¹⁰¹ It was built not far from the town and not near too near – convenient for going and for coming – easily accessible for all who wish to visit by day and not too crowded by night, not exposed to too much noise and alarm.¹⁰² The institution could not have developed further but for the royal munificence, liberal donation from the lay-devotees as also enthusiasm of the monks and nuns for an organised settled life.

Early monastic education seems to have focused upon instructions on the Buddhist doctrines, on the rules of discipline and on the accounts of the previous lives of the Buddha. During the time of Buddha, all teachings were imparted by word of mouth without the use of books. Students had to learn by heart *Dhamma* and *Vinaya*. During the course, there was unrestricted freedom to argue, to dispute, and debate and each was expected to think, reason and decide for oneself all matters of *Vinaya* and *Dhamma*. Monks and nuns were also trained in various cultural subjects, in the tenets of other faiths and in systems of philosophy. The *mahāvihāra* education system adopted various methodological approaches of teaching and learning for monks and nuns as a Gradual Approach, Illustrative Approach, Analytical Approach and Experimental Approach. Gradually, as the monastic institutions grew in size and complexity, the pattern of education also expanded. Buddhist monasteries developed into seats of culture and learning and remained so till Muslim invasions in India destroyed it.

When the *gurukula* education system reached its pinnacle, it attracted many problems that were related to its consolidation. The early Indian society was changing in the lieu for its development about 600 B.C. In fact, the age of *Upaniṣads* was one of the great spiritual unrest and of revolt against the formalism and exclusiveness of

¹⁰⁰ Dipak Kumar Barua, *Vihāras in Ancient India: A Survey of Buddhist Monasteries*, Indian Publication, Calcutta, 1969, p. 02.

¹⁰¹ Walpola Rahula, *History of Buddhism in Ceylon: The Anuradhapura Period 3rd century BC- 10th century AD*, M. D. Gunasena, Colombo, second edition, 1966, p. 115.

¹⁰² *Cullavagga*, VI, 4, 8, 3, 10.

the Brāhmaṇical system.¹⁰³ The *Vedic* educational apparatus now did not satisfy the needs and the requirement of this new society and its member. This led to the evolvement of new *mahāvihāra* education system to satisfy the expectation of many scholars and common folks. In this way, it was the weakness of *gurukula* tradition and the changes in Brāhmaṇical society and religion, which created the environment for the mutation of the *mahāvihāra* education.

The *gurukula* system in reality later became an instrument for dominance in the contemporary society for the *Brāhmaṇas*. The *Brāhmaṇas* managed these *Vedic* schools, as these priests were the persons who had the supreme knowledge of the *Brahma* or the universe through their mastery over the *Vedas*. Gradually they became one and only spiritual supervisor of the society and did not leave any place for other three classes i.e. the *Kṣatriyas*, the *Vaiśyas* and the *Śūdras*. For the *Kṣatriyas* and the *Vaiśyas*, the study of the *Vedas* or the first three *Vedas* was compulsory before they could acquire their professional knowledge, which would then bring them their livelihood. These classes especially the *Kṣatriyas* also wanted to be partner in this enlightenment game as they belonged to the ruling class.

Later by 600 B.C., especially the *Śūdras*, women and other downtrodden classes were not admitted in the *gurukulas*. For the *Śūdras* and women in the Āryan society, the study of the *Vedas* was forbidden and they learnt their professional knowledge of agriculture and animal husbandry, spinning and weaving, fine arts and crafts through the expertise of their own families. These classes also passionately wanted to be educated; as a result, the Buddhist *vihāras* threw their doors open to all classes of the Āryan society.

Sanskrit was the medium of instruction in the *gurukulas*, which had by then become a status symbol of high dignity and intellectuality.¹⁰⁴ The shadow part of this was that the local inhabitants moved further and further away from the contemporary

¹⁰³ E. J. Rapson, *Ancient India from Earliest Time to the first century AD*, fourth edition, Calcutta, 1960, pp. 28-33.

¹⁰⁴ D. D. Kosambi, *The Culture and Civilisation of Ancient India in its Historical Outline*, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1965, p. 167.

educational setup because they could not read and write Sanskrit. Both Mahāvīra and Buddha preached the simplest way to reach salvation but it was Buddhism more than Jainism that posed a threat to Brāhmaṇism.

By 600 B.C., the religion in the *Āryan* society, which had been dominated by Brahmins, had become too ritualistic, dogmatic and complex to attract the simpler folks.¹⁰⁵ Also it was propagated that the *Śūdras* and women will not be able to get salvation. It was Buddha who preached that they could reach salvation and how they can get rid of the misery of this material world.

The evolution and development of the Nālandā education was simultaneous with the growth in Buddhist religion. And it was essential for the new emerging religion to discover any institution, which could be the centre for creation and propagation of their doctrines. This need was fulfilled by the *vihāras* and *mahāvihāras* as a residential complex, which later emerged as educational complexes. Thus, this education was the best way to spread their ideas.

However, the Buddhist *vihāras* did not possess the inherent vitality of the *Vedic* schools. This inherent vitality consisted in making the *Āryan* society completely dependent on the learning imparted by the *Vedic* schools. The *Vedic* schools did not merely taught the religious scriptures but also various arts and crafts including medicine and other useful sciences to meet the various requirements of the society while the services of the *Brahmins* or teachers of the *Vedic* schools were always required by the people at large for various religious observances. This cannot however be said about the Buddhist *vihāras* where its inmates had renounced the world to achieve *nirvana* and solely depended on the charity of the laity for their existence and survival. The Buddhist monks in the Buddhist *vihāras* may well be compared to the last *āsrāma* or stage of the four *āsrāmas* where a person having lived this life fully took to *sannyāsa* to achieve salvation or liberation from rebirth.

¹⁰⁵ T. W. Rhys-Davids, *Buddhist India*, Indological Book House, Delhi, 1970, pp. 107-117.

II.13. The Relation between the Gurukula and the Mahāvihāra System of Education

As we know, till now the whole picture of early Indian education has come out with the compilation of the *gurukula* and the *mahāvihāra* education system. These were the two stages of its growth, where both had reached their point of culmination. It was the accumulation of knowledge and internal structure of the *gurukula* system of education, which provided a base for the development of the monastic educational framework to fulfil the needs and the requirements of the changing society. Both these processes were always simultaneously going on with their ups and down and contributed a lot to the generation of knowledge in their own ways. In this way, we can see many a feature of *gurukula* enlightening was continuing in the *mahāvihāra* system of teaching.

The *gurukula* education was mainly the contribution of Brāhmaṇical culture, religion and society. About 600 B.C., the dominance of pompous rituals, misbelieves in Brāhmaṇical religion and discrimination with the *Śūdras* created tensions in the contemporary society. And to release these tensions, two different faiths Buddhism and Jainism evolved in the society and posed a serious threat to the Brāhmaṇical religion. This is where *mahāvihāra*-learning system of Buddhists through in the form of *vihāras* and *mahāvihāras* came into existence. Although the *mahāvihāra* teaching was the new beginning of organised or institutional education, its many features were incorporated of Brāhmaṇical *Vedic* schools.

How did this maximum extent of continuity occur? The continuity between *gurukula* and *mahāvihāra* system of education was an obvious phenomenon. As we have said, these were developments within the same ancient Indian society and were also results of problems associated with the Brāhmaṇical education and religion. Also because of the result of problems attached with the Brāhmaṇical religion, new religion called Buddhism emerged and this religion was the part of Brāhmaṇical religion. Buddhism never separated itself fully from Brāhmaṇism and dues to this reason Brāhmaṇism devoured itself. This was also one of reasons behind its longer existence and more popularity than the Jainism in India. It is also interesting that the founder of Nālandā educational system or Buddhist education, Mahatma Buddha was also a

product of Brāhmaṇism. When Buddha was in search of truth and enlightenment, he also studied under two renowned *Brāhmaṇa* teachers — first Ālāra Kālāma, then Uddaka Rāmaputta. And the main propagators of Buddhist education system belonged to Brāhmaṇical religion. These true *Brāhmaṇas* remains an ideal in early Buddhist texts and is regarded as highly qualified teachers in Buddhist Order such as, Nāgasena,¹⁰⁶ Sāriputra and Moggallāna,¹⁰⁷ Asvaghosa, Nāgārjuna, Vasubandhu etc. to name just a few. When such scholars embraced the Buddhist doctrine, these converts did not forget their early training, and their linguistic refinement and intellectual sophistication influenced the development of Buddhist literature and thought.

The ultimate goal of *gurukula* and *mahāvihāra* systems of teachings was more or less the same. The greatest contribution of the *Vedic* education is its search for truth; for the knowledge of the *atman* and the *Brahma* with the fulfilment of societal needs. Such search continued vigorously in the Buddhist educational institutions also but by gaining more and more knowledge. The focus on the spiritual liberty or *nirvana* was the main aim of monastery education but the *gurukulas* simultaneously stressed on the societal needs and cohesiveness. Indian teachers were always keen to inculcate the spirit of activity among the inert disciples and tried to sharpen the wits of dull.¹⁰⁸

Initially the Buddhist didactic institutions followed in many aspects the ways of *guru-śiṣya paramparā*. The first step required was the going forth (*pabbajja*), i.e. leaving one's civic life (or in the cases of ascetics of different creeds, their sectarian affiliations) to *jin* — the Buddhist community, which has much similarity with the *upanayana* ceremony. There is also gradation of teachers in *mahāvihāra* scholastic system like *Vedic* schools respectively, such as the *upajjhāya* and the *ācārya*, and the *ācārya* and the *upādhyāya*. The newly joined monks (*sāmanera* or Sanskrit

¹⁰⁶ B. N. Misra, *Nālandā: (Sources and Background)*, Vol.I, B. R. Publishing Corporation, Delhi 1998, pp. 282-302.

¹⁰⁷ *Mahāvagga*, I, 23; also H.A. Giles (retrans.), *The Travels of Fa-hsien*, first edition, Routledge & Kegan Paul, London, 1956, second edition, Indological Book House, Varanasi, 1972, pp. 22f.

¹⁰⁸ Thomas Watters (trans.), *On Yuan Chwang's travels in India: A.D. 629-645*, second edition, Munshiram Manoharlal, Delhi, 1973, p. 160.

srāmanera) in training required a teacher (*ācārya*, also called *karmācārya* ‘teacher of deeds’ possibly because of his concern with conduct and discipline) on whose guidance he depended (*nissāya*).¹⁰⁹ A monk may accept one novice for training only or two or as many as he can handle.¹¹⁰ The *upajjhāya* seemed to rank higher than the *ācārya*, since only he can confer ordination as a monk after twenty years of training of a *srāmanera* and since he gets the major blame if a monk was ordained against the rule before attaining the age of twenty.¹¹¹ Nobody could receive the ordination (*upasampadā*) or become a full monk without an *upajjhāya*. As in the Brāhmanical system, this had to be one individual; a *ācārya* as well as an *upajjhāya* should have been a monk for at least ten years, and should be considered competent by the monastic community.¹¹² Against Brāhmanical practice, here the *upādhyāya* ranks above the *ācārya*!

Their relation could be also described as that of teacher (*ācārya*) and student (*antevāsin*) as close knit as in the Brāhmanical *gurukulas*. There was personal relationship between the teacher and the student just like a father and son. In both systems, the teacher was regarded with the utmost respect and also gets venerated. We can also observe great similarity in the daily life of the monks as noticed by I-Tsiang.¹¹³ They used to start their life with the rising of the sun and start enchanting religious scriptures after Morning Prayer. The begging was the basic thing of their life. Their basic teaching method was also almost same as in the *gurukulas*. The method of instruction was mainly oral with discourses (illustrations, stories and parables), dialogues, questions and answers.

¹⁰⁹ J. Takakusu, *A Record of Buddhist Religion as Practiced in India and the Malay Archipelago* by I-Tsing, London, 1896; Reprinted Munshiram Manoharlal, Delhi, 1966, pp. 104-107; 198; 209.

¹¹⁰ *Mahāvagga*, I, 54.

¹¹¹ *Mahāvagga*, I, 28 and 29.

¹¹² *Mahāvagga*, I, 31, 8, 32, 1. Buddhaghosa makes a distinction that *ācārya* needs only six years’ standing as a monk against ten years for the *upajjhāya*, and *Mahāvagga* allows a competent monk to give *nissāya*, even if he had been a monk for five years.

¹¹³ J. Takakusu, *A Record of Buddhist Religion as Practiced in India and the Malay Archipelago* by I-Tsing, London, 1896; Reprinted Munshiram Manoharlal, Delhi, 1966, p. 21.

While a Buddhist *vihāra* – with its specialised departments of learning and of administration, organised libraries, residential complexes for the monks and a council of elders to advise the chief abbot in running it – resembles very much a modern university, the Brāhmaṇical system of learning throws up features including those adapted by the Buddhist *vihāras* such as debates and discussion at the conferences and assemblies held on sacrificial occasions at the kings court and at a local *parishad*, which characterise our modern learning.

Like the ancient Indian philosophy, Buddha also considered *Dharma* as the highest aim of life. The monasteries and the Buddhist *saṅgha* preached of *Dharma*. Buddhist education laid much emphasis on the physical, mental and spiritual development of the novices. Both the teachers and the taught led disciplined life. The relationship between the teacher and the taught was ideal. The teacher considered the novice as his son and the novice considered him as his father. Corporal punishment was absolutely forbidden. Both the Brāhmaṇical tradition and the Buddhist system of education agreed in the rule that the student has to leave his home and reside with the teacher. Like the ancient Brāhmaṇical system, the Buddhist system also insisted upon the duty of students to serve this teacher by all means. The teacher in both the systems admitted only as many students as he could cope with.

II.14. The Mahāvihāra Learning: A Form of Gurukula

In spite of the above-mentioned similarities with the *Vedic* education system, the *mahāvihāra* system exhibited some fundamental differences. These basic variances were positive in nature, which reflected the gradual advancement of *gurukula* education system. It was aimed at removing problems that were associated with *gurukula* education system and also improving its structure and nature. In this way, the *mahāvihāra* education system started a new era in early Indian education. The changing society, economy and religion demanded revolutionary transformations in Brāhmaṇical education, which emerged in the new form of monastic learning apparatus. The incorporated changes in *mahāvihāra* education system were basically supposed to meet spiritual and educational wishes of marginalised sections of the society.

As a matter of fact, the emergence of *vihāras* formed the chief mark of difference between organised and unorganised systems of education in ancient India in terms of institutionalisation of learning. Although it seemed quite similar to Brāhmaṇical learning model, the *mahāvihāras* educational system, in fact, made a beginning for the age of organised or institutional instructions. Unlike its contemporary Brāhmaṇical pattern, Buddhist learning system centred around the monasteries that functioned as establishments of imparting, training and propagating the Buddhist knowledge and thoughts. These residential and autonomous monastic organisations provided systematic learning to its monks with such basic infrastructural facilities as hostels, mess, wells, temples, etc. The *gurukulas* were predominantly a domestic system of education under which the individual teacher's home became a school for young children who were admitted as pupils. These centres of learning were not equipped with campus and infrastructural facilities necessary for education.

One teacher was teaching all the subjects in the *gurukula* educational system and there was no specialisation. The necessity of a domestic environment in the Brāhmaṇical system did not favour the expansion of a small school under an individual teacher into a large educational institution. On the other hand, with Buddhism, education shifted from the home of the teacher to the monastery. A collective body of teachers who were specialised in different subjects controlled it. Each teacher was master of one or more knowledge, which he taught to pupils. This was the main characteristic of the Buddhist system. This difference from Brāhmaṇical education system was significant as it led to different lines of evolution.

The courses offered at the Buddhist *mahāvihāras* in those days can be equated, in some way to, Masters and Doctorate degrees being offered in modern day universities. They invited those students who had become *snātaka* in *Vedic* schools. However, the *gurukulas* could teach only the elementary forms of knowledge to their inhabitant pupils. Students completing their elementary education at *gurukulas* were considered graduates by monasteries. This was one of the primary reasons why the Buddhist *saṅghas* were particularly interested in the continuous functioning and success of *Vedic* schools. The successes in both the academic and spiritual lives of each education system in ancient times, therefore, remained auxiliary to them.

The Buddhist system of education began with the destruction of home life as the starting point first, and was then home was superseded by monastery. But in the *gurukulas*, students did not have to lose their past identity and culture to which they originally belonged. They usually returned home after the completion of their studies in order to begin their household life, fulfilling both the material and spiritual goals. They never lost their self-identity unless and until they willingly opted for *Vānaprastha* and *Sannyāsa*. The monk's life had a close resemblance to that of an ascetic life of *Vānaprastha* and *Sannyāsa*, but with striking dissimilarities. Unlike a monk, both *Vānaprastha* and *Sannyāsa* could begin their search for supreme knowledge while simultaneously continuing their household life. The monks in the system of *vihāras* had to live only with admissible comforts.

The doors of the Buddhist *vihāras* were always open to all. The *Vinaya* texts claim that the easy life within the Order drew many to it to solve their problems of survival. One of the major limitations of the Brāhmaṇical system of education is that it excluded *Śūdras*, women, *Ānāryas* and most of the *Vaiśyas* from its spiritual and material guidance, leaving almost more than half of the population completely ignorant. The Buddhist system of education on the other hand insisted that the student should be admitted on his personal merit and not on the basis of his family or caste. Logically, while the Brāhmaṇical system of learning appealed more to the head than to the heart, the Buddhist system of learning did just the opposite. It appealed more to the heart than to the head, winning eventually millions to its fold. While Brāhmaṇical education was given in Sanskrit, the language of elite; the Buddhist system of education insisted upon Pāli or Prakrit and other popular languages as the medium of instruction. This was another step towards democratisation of education and making it popular.¹¹⁴

While the Buddhist learning institutions were specialised only in spiritual and religious training; the Brāhmaṇical system, on the other hand, could attain a broader scope by teaching a wide variety of subjects necessary for social good. With the

¹¹⁴ R. N. Sharma and R. K. Sharma (eds.) *History of Education in India*, Atlanta Publishers & Distributors, New Delhi, 2004, p. 41.

passage of time, especially after the beginning of the Rig *Vedic* times, the Brāhmaṇical system rapidly began responding to the social changes taking place at that time. But the Buddhist education system took time to adjust with the changing situations. However, with the later diversification of Buddhism into endless sects, the Buddhist education system reconciled itself gradually and began accepting the changing realities.